

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

8<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

**EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2**

**LOVING IMITATORS**

Adults often find themselves smiling as they watch young children playing at how their play regularly involves imitating the people who are in those children's lives. As parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, even older brothers and sisters, we regularly see the things we do, and the words we say, being played out by the young ones in our lives as they begin to learn and practise how to interact with others in the world. Most of the time this is very cute, and it makes us smile whenever we see ourselves imitated in their play. But of course, almost inevitably, there will come an occasion when a word is said, or an action or activity is copied, which makes us think that perhaps the example we give them isn't always the best one. Many is the parent who has had to be more careful about what they do and say after finding themselves being lovingly imitated by their children in a way they wished had gone unnoticed.

Learning by imitating, or knowing how to fit in by copying others, doesn't stop when we become adults. We still do it all the time, even if we don't think about it. That's why those people called 'influencers' are so popular nowadays, and why they get paid ridiculous amounts of money to show us how we should look and how we should act. But even if we don't follow any influencers, we still pick up things like how we dress, how we speak, even what is nowadays unacceptable even though in the past it was considered ok, we pick up all of those things by imitating people around us. You might think that you're not influenced by others at all, but not many of us are still wearing 70s fashions or speaking in the same way people did 100 years ago. As human beings, as social creatures, we do learn by imitating, both consciously and unconsciously, so that we can fit in with those around us.

A big part of our learning, our social learning around how we interact with others, is done through imitation. And this lies at the basis of what Paul talks about here in today's reading from

Ephesians. These verses in our reading are very direct about the way Christian people are to act towards each other, and why. To start off with, Paul gives us the list of things we should not do to each other when we are all members of the body of Christ; stop lying and start telling the truth; don't be angry with each other; don't steal but work hard so you have something to give to those in need; don't have bad talk but use your words to help others; in all you do, do it in a way that shows God's Spirit is in you; don't be bitter, angry or mad at others; don't yell, curse or be rude.

It is a pretty comprehensive list, isn't it? You might like to break it all down and go through each part and use it as a mirror for your life, but for now, let's look at it as a whole. To sum it up we are being told that everything we say and do is to build others up in their faith and to strengthen their place and membership of the Christian community, both as the Church as a whole and the local Christian communities we might be a part of. It talks very directly then to how we are to accept others and show that acceptance by welcoming and talking with them. It is about how we resolve our differences; both by forgiving those with whom we have a disagreement, and also by being willing to accept and work with the views and needs of others which may be different from our own. Anger is mentioned twice here, both times to say that we shouldn't remain angry at others, or seek our own retribution, but instead let go of our anger so we can move forward. We are told to use what we say to help others, to build them up.

The picture here is of a community in which people work in all things for the good of others, to build them up. Have a think about that. What is your place in that? Are there any things which you could be saying or doing differently? If you can, at some stage take the time to go through these verses more and think what words, attitudes or actions of yours you are being called to change so that you can be a part of building up your Christian community.

And then, after the 'don'ts', Paul moves on to the 'do's'. They are listed very shortly and simply as; be kind, be merciful, forgive others. No further explanation is needed, because these three are the opposite of what is listed beforehand. If we are not to do anything which tears others down,

now we are told we are to do anything we can to build others up. Being kind and merciful is the opposite of being selfish, and forgiving others is the opposite of holding on to our anger.

We then come back to our theme for today of 'Loving Imitations', as Paul writes; 'Do as God does. After all, you are His dear children. Let love be your guide.' (*Ephesians 5:1,2a CEV*) We are to be loving imitations of God as we live our lives. This is because we are loved by God, we are His 'dear children'. We don't earn His love, it's already there for us before we do anything. Now, in the same way as children imitate their parents because they know they are loved and they want to follow and be like them, we are told here to 'Do as God does ..... Let love be your guide'. The love of God is so great, it brings us forgiveness through Jesus and makes us God's much-loved children. By the Holy Spirit this love transforms us from the inside out. It is this love which is now to both shape our attitudes, and also to direct and influence our words and actions. Again, I encourage you at some stage to reflect on and pray about that, and how that comes out now in how you relate to and interact with others.

Children imitate their parents and others in their lives because they love them, and they trust that the way they behave and speak is the right thing to do. As adults we hope we give them good examples to follow, although we know sometimes we do slip up a bit. Not just in this reading, but in many parts of the Bible, we are called to imitate God in the way we live our lives. Here again the focus is on our words and actions always seeking to build others up, and doing all we can so the Holy Spirit can use us in supporting people in their faith. Thank God that He does love us, forgive us, and accept us in all ways. Pray that with His help we might also let love be our guide so that by imitating His love we can build one another up also. Amen.

## **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

### **We Are Part Of The Same Body**

Have a look at what we told in Ephesians 4:25-31 about how Christians should treat one another. Without applying these words to others (always a great temptation), use them to consider how you treat people within your Christian community.

- Are you always truthful both in what you say and how you live? Are people able to trust you and how you treat them?
- Are you angry, or holding on to resentment with anyone in your community? If so, pray for help in forgiving them, and if needed perhaps speak to someone else to help you resolve this situation and bring healing to this relationship.
- Consider if you are always completely accepting of people within your community and your life. Do you judge or disregard others because they have a different opinion to you, even about minor things?
- As believers, the Holy Spirit has come to each one of us, both to build us up in our faith and to enable us to be a part of strengthening the faith of others. Is there anything you do which might threaten the faith of others, rather than building them up?

### **Be Kind and Merciful, and Forgive Others**

To move on to the positives of what we are told here, in verses 31 and 32:

- What does it look like to be kind to others in your Christian community? What words and actions might you say and do if this kindness is what comes from you?
- If you are being merciful, how does that affect your reaction to people, your acceptance of them, your willingness to work in with them?
- Is it always easy to forgive others? Again, if you are finding this difficult in your relationship with someone pray about it, and perhaps talk it through with someone else.

### **Do as God Does – Let Love Be Your Guide**

- List off what a Christian community which seeks to imitate God's love would look like, feel like, sound like.
- What role can you play in helping the Christian community you are a part of be like this?
- Pray for God's forgiveness for the times we as Christians do not treat others as He calls us to do. Ask Him for the strength to live our lives in imitation of His love each day.

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